
January 24, 2010



**ASPEN
VALLEY
WILDLIFE
SANCTUARY**

Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary Pleads Guilty

As many will know, 2009 was a turbulent year for Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary. We experienced a complete change in staff, a complete change in Board of Directors, some public airing of our dirty linen, some negative press – along with a lot of support and encouragement from friends of Aspen and friends of wildlife.

As part of the effort by the Ministry of Natural Resources to assist Aspen in recovering from this turbulence, MNR officials conducted a full inspection of the facility on September 18, 2009. They identified during that process that the count of wolves permanently housed at Aspen was one more than was permitted on the authorization. This has been the case since 2007, apparently the result of a clerical error on our part – no wolves have been added or removed from Aspen during the past two years.

On December 7, MNR officials arrived with a search warrant to seize a female wolf in order to bring us into compliance with our authorization. They did remove the wolf from our care and, in accordance with the law and MNR procedures, laid charges. A summons was issued to each of the Sanctuary, our founder Audrey Tournay, and a former employee. All were required to answer to the charges in court on January 21, 2010.

Although we are not happy about the filing of the charges, it is hard for us to dispute their point. Aspen is required to provide properly completed logbooks to account for all unreleasable animals the Minister has granted us permission to house. In other words, we have the Minister's permission to provide a sanctuary for these animals who, for one reason or another, could not be expected to survive in the wild but who are otherwise healthy animals. In 2007, our clerical blunder meant we misreported in our logbook, and we simply carried on that error over the next two years.

This is an offense under the law. There may be technical reasons that we could have disputed the charges, but in our discussions with MNR and court officials, we concluded that the simplest resolution to this matter was to enter a guilty plea. It was our determination that this is in the best interest of the Sanctuary, of Audrey, and of our ability to continue providing care for the animals. In exchange for the Sanctuary pleading guilty, charges against Audrey and the former employee have been dropped. Aspen agreed to a probationary period of two years, with no financial penalty.

It should be noted the charge and the probation relates *solely* to the permanent wildlife residents of Aspen. This matter does not in any way impact the separate authorization granted to Aspen Valley to rehabilitate and release a large number of animals, as we have for the past forty years.

Essentially, the probation only requires us to comply with the rules and standards we are required to meet anyway. But it does provide us with one benefit – MNR will be in close communication with us throughout the probationary period and will assist us in helping to make the Sanctuary even better than it was in the past. They have expressed that it is their desire to help us help the animals, and that couldn't make us any happier.

And the wolf that they seized? Well, it is not coming back to Aspen. We were required to agree to the forfeiture of this magnificent creature. But we are assured that she will be provided with excellent care in her new home.

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